

## ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION



**US Army Corps  
of Engineers**®  
San Francisco District

### **Project Map**

## **NAPA RIVER SALT MARSH RESTORATION CALIFORNIA**

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT: 1<sup>st</sup> District, Rep. Mike Thompson; 7<sup>th</sup> District, Rep. George Miller

STUDY DESCRIPTION: The 426 square mile Napa River Basin is located approximately 45 miles north of San Francisco, along the northern portion of San Francisco Bay. The river includes a Corps maintained navigation channel constructed in 1933. The river basin also includes a Corps flood control project authorized in 1965, but not yet constructed, consisting of 11 miles of channel, levee and floodwall improvements. Wetlands in the area have been reduced by 75 percent since historic times. The degradation of fish and wildlife resources associated with the loss of these wetlands has resulted in many species being listed as threatened or endangered. The Napa Marsh historically encompassed over 25,000 acres in the Napa River watershed. Today approximately 36% of this acreage remains classified as wetland habitat, while the remainder has been diked to prevent tidal and fluvial inundation under normal conditions for salt production ponds, cropland and pasture.

In 1994, after four decades of operation, the Cargill Salt Company ceased the production of salt and sold 9,850 acres of evaporator ponds and associated lands on the west side of the Napa River to the State of California. The land is currently managed by the California Department of Fish and Game. The Napa River Unit consists of former commercial salt ponds (approximately 6700 acres), levees, and remnant slough and marsh habitat. The former salt ponds provide an opportunity to restore tidal and related wetlands within San Francisco Bay on an unprecedented scale.

In 1994, Congress authorized funds for a Reconnaissance Study of salt marsh restoration in the Napa River Basin. Funds were first appropriated in FY96. The Reconnaissance Study was completed in August 1997 and recommended that a Feasibility Study be pursued. The California State Coastal Conservancy and the Corps entered into a Feasibility cost sharing agreement in February 1998.

FISCAL YEAR 03 BUDGET: \$100,000

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS: Restoration of former salt production ponds along the lower Napa River, currently managed by the California Department of Fish and Game, to tidal marshes.

PRESENT STATUS: Phase I of the Feasibility Study, which identified pre-project conditions, was completed in April 2001. Phase II will begin in FY02, if funds are available, and will identify the final array of alternatives for restoration.

The California Department of Fish and Game and the State Coastal Conservancy have identified accelerated deterioration of site levees and infrastructures left from the Cargill operations. If no action is taken, there will be a continued loss of habitat for migratory water birds due to increasing salinity levels within the former salt evaporation ponds that now occupy much of the project area. If restoration of the former salt ponds is not initiated in the near future, significant ecological resources could be seriously impacted by the uncontrolled release of highly saline water from the ponds into the Napa River. The non-federal sponsors have requested an additional \$1,200,000 be reprogrammed by the Corps to accelerate the Districts technical studies during FY02. Current funds will be exhausted at the end of March 2002, and work on the project will cease unless additional funds can be made available. The California State Coastal Conservancy and Fish and Game are proposing that the Napa Salt Marsh Project be added to the Water Resources Development Act of 2002 in order to accelerate the construction schedule required for restoring the site; however, without additional funding the District can not support this schedule.

FUTURE EFFORTS: During the early phase of the Feasibility Study, Skaggs Island was identified as a potential companion project to the restoration of the Napa salt marsh. A combined project could enhance the restoration processes for both sites due to the hydraulic connection between the Napa Salt Marsh Project and Skaggs Island.

The Sonoma Water Agency has identified a strong interest in providing tertiary-treated waste water (recycled water) as a temporary source of fresh water to be used in the removal of salts from the ponds. A pipeline which could be used to deliver recycled water for environmental restoration of the salt ponds currently exists within .5 miles of the upper ponds. Due to regulatory constraints on drawing water from the Napa River, the feasibility of using this additional source of fresh water for reducing salinity is being investigated.